

# The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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*"Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"*

## Editorial Intelligent Design & Creation

In my editorial in the July issue of the SS (**It all rests on faith in God and Jesus**) I made reference to the concept of Intelligent Design and wrote that it was "a euphemism for creationism". After some further reading and discussion I need to retract that statement because it is potentially misleading. It has become clear to me that the concept of Intelligent Design does not at all necessarily equate to divine creation as most Christians have traditionally understood and

expressed it. I'm not here wanting, or indeed knowledgeable enough, to comment authoritatively on the whole gamut of 'creation issues'. It is enough to affirm that we believe that creation is the product of the design and implementation of God and that even today it is his word that upholds the universe.

### **INTELLIGENT DESIGN THEORY**

The most recent discussion about Intelligent Design (ID) was provoked by President Bush suggesting that the theory should be taught in American Schools as a standard part of the curriculum. Presumably the intention was to provide a counterbalance to the prevailing pattern to teach Darwinism as fact and largely ignore 'Bible creation'.

The problem is that ID is very much a half-way house in that it does not demand God as a creative power nor as a source of the design that is evident in the universe. Darwin's evolutionary theory would of course regard any evidence of 'design' as the natural outworking of the evolutionary process – having the hallmarks of design but with no concept of a designer, the process of evolution itself having produced a result that is fit for purpose and satisfying the natural requirements at that stage of the evolution of the species. In Darwin's world, what appears to be design is to be regarded as an illusion.

Early design theory (it is believed to have been around in one form another since the time of ancient Greece) does seem to have roots in theological thought and the most famous version of the design argument can be found in the work of a theologian,

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William Paley, who in 1802 proposed a 'watchmaker' thesis. He states that coming across a stone lying on the ground, and asking how it came to be there, one might conclude that it had lain there for ever. However coming across a watch, the fine co-ordination of all its parts and the fact that it had an obvious purpose, would lead one to believe that at some time and in some place, the watch must have had a maker who designed its use and formed it for a purpose.

## **INTELLIGENT DESIGN & GOD**

Interestingly, so far as the more recent concepts of ID are concerned, it is the **opponents** of ID who insist, whatever its advocates say, that it must have roots in theology or religion, whilst the modern **proponents** of ID, as stated earlier, do not demand the God of Christian theology as the designer. In a very real sense this is where the battleground exists between evolutionists and proponents of ID. Evolutionists are quick to say that ID is by definition driving towards the concept of a creative force and, as a creative force is unprovable, it therefore represents bad science (or lacks any scientific integrity at all). Proponents of ID insist that the concept does have a reliable basis in science and refer to design detection – how to recognize patterns arranged by an intelligent cause for a purpose, as having scientific integrity.

There does not seem to be one single accepted definition of ID. However the theory basically holds that certain features of the universe, and of living things, are best explained by an intelligent cause rather than an undirected process such as natural selection; that nature shows tangible signs of having been designed by a pre-existing intelligence.

Both proponents of evolution and of ID have something of a major problem. Evolutionists, as we know, contend that however complex the biological systems and patterns that support life in all its manifestations, these are all the product of natural selection, or more basically, chance. There is no allowance in the theory of natural selection for any kind of design, as the introduction of design blows a fairly substantial hole in the theory. There is no room for it.

On the other hand the body of scientists who hold to the concept of ID, whilst recognizing the complexity of biological development and insisting that such complexity demands the input of a 'higher intelligence', largely do not want to countenance the idea of a Creator God. Indeed one of ID's main proponents, a William Dembski, has said: "Design requires neither magic nor miracles nor a creator." Another leading advocate, one Michael Behe is reported as writing: "The conclusion of intelligent design flows naturally from the data itself – not from sacred books or sectarian beliefs." "Inferences to design" contends Behe, "do not require that we have a candidate for the role of designer."

## **'ID' IS NOT CHRISTIAN CREATIONISM**

For many advocates of Intelligent Design then, the concept is most certainly not a euphemism for creationism as Christians would understand it. I know we are biased but it really does seem staggering that apparently intelligent people can come up with two theories: either that all of the biological complexity around us, and of which we are a part, is the product of random occurrences or natural selection and the evidence of design is merely illusory; or the same complexity evidenced in living organisms is of such a high order that it can only come from an intelligent source, but that such design does not need a designer or a creator (but does need some kind of creative intelligence). Confused? Reading between the lines it seems apparent that the verbal machinations of the ID lobby are designed (sic) only for one thing – to keep out any admission of a theologically based creator force i.e. God. On the other hand the opponents of ID take precisely the opposite

view – ID **demands an intelligent creative force** – i.e. God by any other name. In one article I read the writer says: *"By the very nature of its approach, "intelligent design" cannot be satisfied with a "designer" who is party of the natural world. Such a "designer" would not answer the basic question its advocates raise: it would not explain biological complexity as such. The only designer that would stop their quest for a "design" explanation of complexity is a "designer" about whom one cannot ask any questions or who cannot be subjected to any kind of scientific study – a "designer that transcend" nature and its laws – a "designer" not susceptible of rational explanation – in short: a supernatural "designer"."*

## **IS 'ID' RELEVANT TO CHRISTIANITY?**

What, if anything, does this mean for Christians. ID has been around for some time as a concept but has gained new prominence recently as a result of President Bush's remarks. Those remarks certainly generated a lot of correspondence in my daily newspaper, much of it, as we might expect, attacking the whole concept of ID. The greater part of the attack on ID was because of the alleged lack of a scientific basis and the religious overtones that, in the opponent's view, attach to the concept. Although I can only present this as personal opinion, the other factor is that the implications of allowing any kind of design, intelligence or creative element into the debate is far too uncomfortable to contemplate because it can have no part in Darwinian evolutionary theory.

However there is no comfort in the Intelligent Design concept for Christians as it is expressed by many of its advocates. Of course the fact that there is an element of creative force and design intelligence within the concept is a step in the right direction but the utter confusion that then seems to emerge about the nature or identity of that creative element in biological complexity must damage the credibility and integrity of the concept. Of course if people do not believe in the God of creation, then it is unreasonable to expect that they will regard God as the "designer" – perhaps the implications of acknowledging God are too great for them.

Many of us will never have the scientific knowledge to argue the merits or otherwise of the various theories that try to explain the massive complexity of biological development and living organisms. However we should always remember that 'theories', even Darwinian evolutionary theory, is precisely what it says on the tin – a theory, however much it may be presented and taught as fact.

At the very least the Christian understanding of creation has the essential merit of accepting that there is complexity in the universe and that there is inherent design, purpose and order that we see every day. We also have a positive and identifiable link to the source of that creation – God. The argument is conceptually sound and eternally consistent. Is a pre-existent, creative God scientifically provable? Well, not to my knowledge, but then it is not scientifically provable either that at some indeterminable time in the past something emerged from nothing from which the biological complexity that we are an essential part of has randomly developed. That's why even when all the evidence has been analysed - **it all depends on faith in God and Jesus.**

There is no refuge for Christians then in intelligent design. As it is expressed by many of its advocates it allows no room for the God of creation – in fact it seems to positively try to eliminate a God-like designer from the concept. So we are left with the Biblical account of creation, a creator God who even now upholds the world by the word of his power, whose handiwork we can see and rejoice in. And our God revealed himself, in Jesus, in a way that all could understand and demonstrated his power over life and death. Quite simply we don't need intelligent design or any other theory to sustain our faith.

(Sources: [www.intelligentdesignnetwork.org](http://www.intelligentdesignnetwork.org) ; [www.arn.org](http://www.arn.org) ; [www.objectivismonline.net](http://www.objectivismonline.net) )

# Jesus is... Eternal

(Jeff W Wealand, USA)

Who is Jesus? What exactly is his identity? The answer is twofold, fully human, fully Divine! The identity of Jesus is unique as the apostle John described it in his Gospel 1:1-14. God the Word, became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth.

Why even ask the question? For this purpose alone. If you are going to follow someone to the ends of the earth all your life, and possibly encounter martyrdom for them, wouldn't you want to know how special and unique they are? Would you want to give your every ounce of strength on a stormy Sunday to someone who isn't really uniquely special? Do you want to stake your eternal destiny upon the words of just another guru or in someone truly unique?

John the Immersionist was born about 6 months before Jesus, his cousin, yet, in John 1:30 he is quoted as saying, **"because He existed before me"**. There are only two ways his statement can make any sense. John, the older cousin of Jesus, either believed in reincarnation, or he believed Jesus was God. Which is true? Since reincarnation is rooted 300 years before Christ in India with Buddhism and not Judaism, we can rule that out clearly as not being in the mind of John from Judah. Reincarnation is opposed by the Jewish scriptures in the story of the witch at Endor (1st Sam. 28:7-12), for if Samuel had been reincarnated, he never would have appeared to the shocked witch in the first place and been recognized!

No, Jesus never existed before, in another human being. But Jesus did exist before Bethlehem, in the form of the Word - as God (John. 1:1) since before the foundation of the world. When God said the very words, **"let us make man in Our image"** (Gen. 1:26), his word was living, active and divine. His word was Himself, God. What His word made in creation is not eternal of course, but the word Himself, being God, is eternal. The eternal trinity is a Biblical fact from Genesis 1:1-3. A - God, The Initiating Organizer & Executor in creation, B - The Spirit of God hovering over the surface of the waters, and C - God's Word being divinely set into action, **"let there be Light"**.

Actually when you think about it, Jesus knew this to be true, and proclaimed it in Jerusalem during the last week of his life on earth, when he said (John. 12:46), **"I have come as a Light into the world"**. What kind of light we may ask? It's not solar! That was made on day four of creation. The light which lit and created the first day, was the Eternal Word. His effect was daytime! Day was created and is temporary, but the Light is eternal in Jesus, who never changes from yesterday, today and on into tomorrow. The divine light in Jesus is the life of man and is constant throughout this life and on through death itself into eternity, because Jesus is eternal. That is who we want to follow forever!

Light as we use it, is usually solar, its speed can be measured and its qualities utilized in many different ways. But the Eternal Light in Jesus cannot be measured, because it is what gives us life inside us. The Hebrew writer in Heb. 12:9 calls God the Father of spirits. This is the Eternal God giving human spirits a beginning into life which will last forever. Our human spirit may be very strong, but it has a beginning both in the mind of God and in the womb of our mother, which means it is not eternal, it's only in the image of God, not God himself. It is only when the human spirit submits in obedience to Jesus, by believing in His victorious death and resurrection through baptism, that we are given an Eternal Spirit to abide with our human spirit. Assuring us that we are going to live forever in His righteousness, and not forever in our own consequences of sinfulness. I love the eternity of Jesus, for it insures the infinite salvation of our human spirit - who we truly are. I hope you can see that the real you, only has hope in the Eternal Jesus. The very same fact the apostle Paul rejoiced in mentioning to Timothy, 1st Tim. 1:1.

No matter what other people may say you are, if you are in the Eternal Jesus, it doesn't really matter. For from the beginning when God knew you in your mother's womb, He knew all the best that you could be in His Son Jesus. If you are in Jesus, His Spirit can transform your fleshly desires into desires to labour for the Lord of love. He can use those fleshly desires to glorify Him in your daily life. The Psalmist sung, "**Praise ye the LORD. I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation. The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. His work is honourable and glorious: and his righteousness endureth for ever. He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is gracious and full of compassion.**" (Psa. 111:1-4) If there is anything worth remembering about you, when you are gone from this world, it is how the Lord of love used you, to show his grace and live the law of faith in Christ. That is the great stuff eternity is made of in heaven, where memories never fade.

## **SOME ADDITIONAL SHORT-FORM REFERENCES**

### ***THE PRE EXISTENCE, Jn 1:1 18***

***INTRO: v15, John the Baptist was 6 months older than Jesus his cousin, yet he knew Jesus was really before him. This knowledge motivated him to prophesy. If this is realized by ourselves, it will motivate us, the only man, our Saviour that lived before and after this life.***

#### ***I. Jesus as The Word. v1 2***

1. *The word was in harmony "WITH" God and in identity the same as God. What can be said of the Word can be said of God, the Word was only distinct in mission, not character.*
2. *The word became flesh, visibly present, v14.*
  - a. *Beholding his glory in the flesh as the grace and truth he gave, IJn 1:1, hearing, seeing, handling the word of life.*
  - b. *Beholding his glory in the flesh as in the miracles and transfiguration.*
  - c. *Beholding his glory in the flesh as of the Father, 2Pt 1:16 18.*

#### ***II. Jesus and Creation.***

1. *If not anything had been made, then it shows Jesus' real identity was not created.*
2. *"Was In The World", invisibly present, renewing, sustaining creation, Col 1:16 17.*
3. *All authority in heaven and earth, Mt 28:18.*

#### ***III. Jesus as The Light and Glory. v4 5***

1. *Jesus' life was the light of men, Jn 5:26. Light reveals, Word communicates. An active agent as God Himself, He wants to help us help ourselves in a spiritual famine, Hb 5:9.*
2. *The Light rejected,*
  - a. *As many as received, gave he the right, v12, the power to become.*
  - b. *Why didn't the darkness comprehend the light? The power of the will of man; every man chooses to believe or reject, v7; John the Baptist was looking for those that might believe. His own didn't RECEIVE him, v11, "To Take When Offered", used in taking a wife, Mt 1:20 24, There is action, commitment, agreement and purpose involved.*
3. *The True Light, v5, purpose of the light was to shine in the darkness, he said he came to seek and save the lost. Lk 19:10.*

***CONCLUSION: We can know we are of the true light when we are shining in the darkness. We can know & understand God by what the Word did. Jesus' real identity was what made and holds the world together to this day. The pre existence of Jesus dictates there is life in him for us if we are in him.***



## The historical and cultural background to the New Testament (5)

Ian S Davidson, Motherwell

### HERODS'S TEMPLE

This was a magnificent building, which dominated Jerusalem in New Testament times. The temple was built on a platform about 1,476 ft from north to south and 984 ft east to west. The height of the building was, at its maximum, 90 ft. The massive enclosure wall was built of limestone blocks mostly 3 ft high and 16 ft long. There were gates in each of the four walls. The temple consisted of a series of courts – the Court of the Gentiles (largest court); the Court of Women; the Court of the Israelites (men only) and the Court of the Priests, into which only the priests could go. At the far end of the Court of Priests was the Holy Place and, behind a veil, the Holy of Holies, into which, only once a year on the Day of Atonement, entered the high priest. "The height of the Temple must have filled every visitor with awe. The Temple proper was itself twice as large as it had formerly been." (Bo Reicke). "The outer courtyard, the Court of the Gentiles, was open to anyone and was surrounded by a portico inside the walls. The porch on the east side was known as Solomon's porch, and it was inside these colonnades that the scribes held their schools and debates. This would also have been where the money-changers and merchants had their stalls, which Jesus overturned. The inner courtyard was on a slightly higher level and was surrounded by a balustrade. Notices in Greek and Latin warned Gentiles that if they entered the inner court they were liable to be executed." (J.A. Thompson) "...Jewish tradition could say, 'He that has not seen the Temple of Herod, has never known what beauty is'. And yet Israel despised and abhorred the builder!" (Alfred Edersheim)

In the Court of Priests two daily sacrifices took place - a lamb every morning at daybreak and a lamb every afternoon. The sacrifices were accompanied by choral singing and congregational prayers. The service of praise had musical accompaniment. On the Sabbath two lambs were offered in the morning and two in the afternoon. On new moons and festival days the sacrifices were greatly multiplied.

### FESTIVALS AND FEASTS

There were three great pilgrimage-festivals – the seven-days Feast of Unleavened Bread, inaugurated by the Passover Feast (*Pesach*); the Feast of Pentecost or Weeks (*Shavuot*) and the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths (*Sukkot*). Originally, these festivals were tied in with agriculture – the first with the beginning of the barley and wheat harvest; the second with the end of the barley and wheat harvest; and the third with the end of the vintage and olive harvest. "But by New Testament times – and as regards the first and the third of these festivals much earlier – their agricultural significance had been overlaid by historical commemoration: the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorated the unleavened cakes which the Israelites baked in their hasty departure from Egypt (Exodus 12:39), the Feast of Pentecost commemorated the giving of the law at Sinai (Exodus 19:1ff) and the Feast of Tabernacles commemorated the booths in which the Israelites lived during their wilderness wanderings." (Lev. 23:42f) (Bruce). Many Jewish males still tried to follow the ancient directive to be present at the sanctuary on the festival dates. In addition to these pilgrimage-festivals there was New Year's Day (*Rosh Hashana*), the Feast of *Chanukah* or Dedication, the Feast of *Purim* and the Day of Atonement. (*Yom Kippur*)

The priests also supervised the sacrifices of private individuals. For example, individual offerings would include the thank-offering for deliverance from danger. The priests must have been kept busy every day. I think an interesting exercise for all believers would be to consider the significance of the Court, the Holy Place, the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant, Altar of Burnt Offering, Altar of Incense, the Laver, the Golden Lampstand, the Table of Showbread, the Sin-offering, Burnt-offering, Trespass-offering, Meal-offering and Peace-offering. I am certain we would soon be thinking about the world, the Church, heaven, the New Covenant, Christ's sacrifice, prayer, baptism, the Bible, the Lord's supper, reconciliation, atonement, forgiveness, thanksgiving and communion.

## THE SYNAGOGUE

I have only been in a Jewish synagogue once. But I found the experience in Jerusalem a most fascinating one. A Jewish scholar explained to the Gentile visitors everything about the service as it developed. One of the things that struck with me was the welcome the Conservative Jews gave to the Sabbath. She was greeted as a bride entering the main door. Thereafter, all of us wished one another a '*Shabbat Shalom.*' (a peaceful Shabbat)

The origins of the synagogue probably date to the Babylonian captivity. The Greek word, of course, originally means 'a meeting place'. So exiled Jews would gather at the synagogue to pray, learn, discuss and enjoy social activities. "Two aspects were important from the beginning. In the presence of the whole worshipping community each individual can concentrate on his/her own private prayers, but together with the whole congregation, each listens to the reading of Biblical texts and their explanation. Thus children may sing:

*In the synagogue we celebrate just like a family...*  
*In the synagogue on Friday night we greet the Sabbath bride...*  
*In the synagogue we study and learn about our Jewish past*  
*Bet K'neset - house of meeting,*  
*Bet tefillah - house of prayer,*  
*Bet midrash - house of study,*  
**Jewish life is happening there! "**

(The Synagogue, a publication by the Council of Christians and Jews)

Luke (Luke 4:16ff; Acts 13:14ff) provides details of the synagogue service in Nazareth in the days of Jesus and in Pisidian Antioch in the days of Paul. We see that Jesus sat down to expound upon the early verses of Isaiah 61 and Paul stood to exhort the gathering following the readings from the Pentateuch and the Prophets. A typical service would also include prayers, petitions and a benediction. To conduct public worship in a synagogue ten adult males were required. The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD did not end Judaism. Synagogues throughout the Empire and beyond helped the Jews maintain their unique way of life for many generations to come. "The book of Acts indicates the significant role the synagogue played in the propagation of the new Messianic faith." (C. L. Feinberg)

## JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

The first believers were Jews. (Acts 2) They confessed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Persecution resulted in many fleeing Jerusalem and spreading the message wherever they went. The first Gentile converts were Cornelius and his household at Caesarea through the preaching of the apostle Peter. (Acts 10) The church in Jerusalem endorsed the development of Jew and Gentile together in the church. But problems soon arose because some Christian Jews felt threatened. They argued that Christianity had its roots in Judaism and, therefore, all Gentile converts should also keep the Jewish Law. Eventually, a council was convened in Jerusalem to discuss the matter with a view to resolution. (Acts 15) Paul and Barnabas were there from Antioch and reported on their work with the Gentiles. Peter and James also made telling speeches on this occasion. For example James said: "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood." (Acts 15:19-20, N.I.V.) A letter was duly sent, a copy of which is found in Acts 15.



Many Jews regarded Christians as heretics. Hostilities grew as the number of converts grew. The Roman authorities first saw Christians as a Jewish sect, but they later realised that the followers of Jesus were of a new religion. In the First Jewish War (66-70 AD) Christians fled Jerusalem in the light of warnings from Jesus Himself (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) After the defeat of the Jews by the Romans, Christians were then forbidden to worship in the synagogues and were even cursed in prayers. "Christianity and Judaism had become totally separate." (Edwin Yamauchi)

# WHEN WAS THE TEMPLE TO BE DESTROYED?

## An exposition of Luke 21 verses 5 to 33

(Allan Ashurst, Stretford)

Whereas in Luke 17 the Lord Jesus is answering the Pharisees' question about when the kingdom of God would come, here in Luke 21 it is the Lord's prediction of the devastation of the temple that prompts the disciples' questions. The Lord's response is also recorded in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. Comparing Luke's record with these helps us to understand it better.

Again the 'Chronology' of historical events in July's article "**When will the Kingdom of God come?**" needs to be borne in mind to avoid being sidetracked.

### Verses 5-7 - THE DISCIPLES' QUESTIONS

**Their questions addressed two distinctly different issues.** The disciples ask the Lord when the temple building would be destroyed and what sign would indicate that this would happen (verse7). From Matthew 24:3 we learn that they also asked what would be the sign of the Lord's coming and of 'the end of the age'.\* (*\* the AV has "the end of the world" The primary meaning of the word translated 'world' is age, era. [Greek AION]. The apostles might have been confusing the consummation of the Mosaic era with the second coming of the Lord.*)

Now it will be seen from Matthew's record that they appear to confuse one with the other but the two are distinctly different. Two matters are being considered:

- One is the events leading up to the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple (AD 70).
- The other is 'the coming of the Son of man' on the day of Judgement.

In Matthew and Mark's records the word "that" makes this distinction clear:

But of **that** day and hour no *man* knows, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. (Matthew 24:36)

But of **that** day and hour no man knows, no, not the angels who are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father *only*. Take heed, watch and pray: for you do not know when the time is. (Mark 13:32, 33)

- Signs would enable them to predict the destruction of the Temple.
- There will not be any means by which we will be able to predict the coming of the Lord.

Increasing social and political unrest would enable them to anticipate the siege of Jerusalem. The onset of the siege of Jerusalem would alert them to be ready for when they could make their escape. This is contrasted with how no one can predict the coming of the Son of man in judgement. For this reason it is emphasised that we must always be ready for the Lord's appearance.

It would then be folly to allow any favourite theological outlook to influence our interpretation so as to make it appear that Luke's account contradicts the Lord's plain statement as recorded in Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32, 33 - "But of **that** day and hour no man knows, no, not the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but my Father only."

Any interpretation of Luke's account that contradicts this statement cannot be right.

### Verses 8-19 - FALSE MESSIAHS, REBELLIONS AND PERSECUTION

Before the siege of Jerusalem there would be many disturbing events: false messiahs, battles in various countries, widespread anarchy,(1) earthquakes, famine and plagues. The disciples to whom he was speaking would be persecuted by the Jewish religious leaders, be betrayed even by their close relatives and killed. Everywhere they would be hated.

All this would happen before the temple would be destroyed. (Luke 21:8-17. cp. Matthew 24:4-13 and Mark 13:5-13) They were required to remain faithful throughout all those traumatic experiences (Matthew 24:13. Mark 13:13). By their steadfastness they must gain their souls, (Luke 21:19) even



though it might result in them being killed, (Luke 21:16) so that, spiritually speaking, not a hair of their head would perish (Luke 21:18).

**"You will be betrayed both by parents, and brothers, and kinsfolk, and friends; and they shall cause some of you to be put to death. And you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not a hair of your head perish. By your steadfastness you must gain your souls."** (Luke 21:16-19)

In Matthew 24:14 Mark 13:10 we learn that only when the Gospel had been preached to all nations would the temple economy be finally terminated. The destruction of the temple and the cessation of the sacrifices brought to an end all vestiges of the Mosaic era. Paul, writing to Hebrew Christians a few years before the destruction of the temple, said:

**"In that he said, a new covenant, he has made the first old. Now that which decays and grows old is ready to vanish away."** [Hebrews 8:13]

### **Verses 20-24 - THE SIGN THAT IT WAS TIME TO FLEE JERUSALEM AND JUDEA.**

In Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14, one sign in particular is referred to as "the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet." These are the three different times of desolation mentioned in Daniel:

#### **1) The destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar**

**"Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of your servant, and his supplications, and cause your face to shine on your sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake."** (Daniel 9:17)

#### **2) The desolation that was caused by Antiochus Epiphenese.**

**"Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint who said to that certain saint which spoke, "How long shall the vision be concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?"** (Daniel 8:13)

**"And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days."** (Daniel 12:11)

#### **3) The series of desolations that occurred at the time of the Roman siege (from AD68 to AD 70).**

**"And after sixty two periods of seven Messiah will be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end of it will be with a flood, and to the end of the war desolations are determined. And he will confirm the covenant with many for one period of seven: and in the middle of the period of seven he will cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and he will make it desolate for the overspreading of abominations, even until the consummation, and that determined will be poured on the desolate."** (Daniel 9:26-27)

The third is the one referred to by the Lord. It predicts how that, after the execution of the Messiah, war and desolations would be poured upon "the desolate". The city and the temple would be destroyed by a prince. This was done by Titus in AD70. (2)

The words "desolations are determined" indicate that it would be a period of several desolations. These culminated in the destruction of the temple and devastation of Jerusalem and Judaea.

In Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14 we learn that the Lord spoke of a specific desolation, taking place where it had no right to be, even in 'the Holy Place'. This was the first of the two sacred rooms of the temple proper. Josephus records how, to the dismay of many priests, Jewish Zealots took over the temple during the siege and turned it into a fortress.

They were to flee when **1)** the Temple Holy Place was desecrated and, **2)** the city was surrounded by Roman troops. [Luke 21:20-21; Matt.24:15-18; Mark 13:14-16] Troops encircling the city would

indicate that its devastation was imminent. The desolation mentioned in Matthew and Mark is the desecration of the Holy Place by the Jewish Zealots. Whereas the desolation referred to in Luke 21:20 is the devastation of the city. **"And when you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation of it is near. Then let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let those who are in the midst of it depart out; and do not let those who are in the countries enter into it."**(Luke 21:20-21)

During the siege of AD70 there was a short break in hostilities. That day, Christians, heeding this advice, took that opportunity to flee Jerusalem. According to the historian Eusebius there was no record of any Christian perishing in the siege.

### **They were to flee Judea and go into the mountains**

**"For it shall come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole country."** (Luke 21:35)

The mountains on the east of Jordan have numerous interconnecting caves where numerous folk could hide in safety. In Matthew 24:23-26 and Mark 13:21-23 they are again warned to ignore false Messiahs because when the Lord does come it will not be in some obscure place but it will occur universally.

### **The ensuing devastation was God's judgement on the Nation**

The horrors that would ensue would exceed anything else in history, either in the past or in the future. (2) [Luke 21:22-24; Matt.24:19-22; Mark 13:17-20] **"For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written might be fulfilled."** (Luke 21:22)

Pilate had offered to release the Lord Jesus or Barabbas. Those rejecting the Lord the crowd said, **"His blood be on us, and on our children."** [Matthew 27:25].

### **Verses 25-26 - AFTER THE DEVASTATION - SPIRITUAL DARKNESS SET IN**

From the parallel passages of Matthew 24:29 and Mark 13:24,25 it is evident that Luke 21:25,26 refers to a period of confusion immediately following the devastation of Jerusalem. **"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."** (Matthew 24:29) **"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken."** (Mark 13:24-25)

In Matthew and Mark the word **"those"** directs the mind back beyond his immediate comments to what he said earlier about the destruction of the temple. This political and religious hierarchical chaos immediately followed the destruction of the temple and the devastation of Jerusalem and Judaea. **"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring, Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken."** (Luke 21:25,26)

Figurative language similar to Luke 21:25-26 is used of spiritual and political confusion in the Hebrew Scriptures. [Isaiah 2:19,21, 13:10-13, 24:23, 34:4, 60:19-20, Ezekiel 32:7-8 and Joel 2:28-32, 3:15]

### **Verse 27 - THIS DARKNESS WILL NOT END UNTIL THE LORD APPEARS.**

The apostle, Paul, wrote of a man of sin causing chaos in the temple of God - i.e. in the Church. The man of sin is seen at work in such as Diotrefes [3.John 9]. This personified evil, this agent of Satan was already at work in Paul's time [2.Thessalonians 2:7] The desire for supremacy in power hungry members of the Church produced political hierarchies, causing darkness and chaos. This was restrained by the persecution but came into its own under the Emperor Constantine. The perpetrator of darkness will be destroyed by the brightness of the Lord's light at his appearing. [2.Thessalonians 2:1-8] The Lord will appear instantaneously, everywhere on the last day. Then the wicked will mourn and the faithful will be taken to be with the Lord for eternity. [Luke 21:27; Matthew 24:30-31; Mark 13:26-27. Reference "wail" "see" "clouds" Matthew 26:64. John 5:27-29. Acts 1:9, 11. 1.Corinthians 15:52. 2.Thessalonians 1:7-10. 2.Peter 3:7, 10, 12. Revelation 1:7]

## **Verses 28-33 - ASSURANCE THAT THE KINGDOM WAS AT HAND**

In Luke 21:28 the Lord reverts to matters preceding the devastation of Jerusalem talking of things that would all occur within their generation. **"Verily I say to you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled."** (Luke 21:32)

**The Lord's arrest, trial and crucifixion, were (paradoxically) indicators that the kingdom of God was imminent.**

John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ had persistently preached the imminent establishment of the Kingdom of God. Within a few days his disciples would be thrown into disarray by the trauma of the Lord's arrest and crucifixion. This would cause them to seriously question if and when the kingdom of God would begin. [Matthew 26:31; Luke 24:21; Acts 1:3-6] So the Lord is advising them in advance that these crises actually confirm the imminence of the kingdom. **"However, these things are beginning to come to pass, be alert, and lift up your heads; for your redemption is drawing near."** (Luke 21:28,29)

He uses the parable of the fig tree to illustrate that they needed to understand that the onset of these events indicated the kingdom of God was about to be established. **"So likewise you, when you see these things coming to pass, know that the kingdom of God is near."** [Luke 21:31]

The crucifixion paved the way for redemption and the inauguration of His kingdom. So - paradoxically, during these crises they were to "lift up their heads".

### **"This generation"**

All the predictions leading up to and including the destruction of the Temple would be fulfilled within the lifetime of people listening to the Lord Jesus. [Luke 21:32] Dreadful and devastating as the events would be they would not stop the Lord's words continuing to reach out to all mankind. [Luke 21:33]

They were to not to let their vigilance lapse because the whole country would be ensnared by the devastating armies of Rome. (Luke 21:35) If the people of that time needed to be vigilant for what could be predicted, how much should we be vigilant and ready for what cannot be predicted - that is be ready for the Lord's appearance.

## **Matthew 25 - ALWAYS BE PREPARED FOR THE LORD'S SUDDEN APPEARANCE**

Matthew 25 continues with three parables illustrating the need to always be prepared for the Lord's appearing. The first one emphasises that we cannot know when he will come. **"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of man comes."** (Matthew 25:13)

Mark has this additional warning. **"For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch therefore: for you do not know when the master of the house comes, at evening, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say to you I say to all, Watch."** (Mark 13:34-37)

The Lord Jesus says, 'I am definitely coming suddenly.'

Can we with confidence and with joy say: 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.' [Revelation 22:20]

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- (1) Within 18 months the emperors Nero, Galba, Otho and Vitellius were assassinated.
  - (2) See study notes on these prophecies on the Internet:  
<http://members.aol.com/d4web4sm/extrainf/daniel0q.htm>
  - (3) For a detailed account of the siege of Jerusalem see William Whiston's translation of Flavius Josephus' Complete, Kregal, Grand Rapids, Michigan: 'The Antiquities of the Jews' book XVIII chapters 5, 9, book XX chapter 8 and 'The Wars of the Jews,' book I The Preface, book IV chapter 9, book V chapters 10, 11, book VI chapters 3 to 9.



**QUESTION**

Please explain the apparent discrepancy between the Matthew/Mark accounts of the healing of the blind men at Jericho, and that of Luke.

A cluster of several grey question marks of varying sizes, some overlapping.

The brother who submitted the question we are to consider this month describes it as 'a knotty problem'... He points out that the accounts of the healing of the blind men at Jericho as recorded by Matthew and Mark on the one hand, and Luke on the other, reveal 'an apparent discrepancy'. The verses that you should read are, Matt. 20:29, Mark 10:46 and Luke.18:35.

This is what we find:

1. Matthew tells us that as the Lord was 'leaving Jericho' there were *two blind men* sitting by the roadside.
2. Mark's account also states that, as He was 'leaving Jericho' Jesus healed a *blind beggar*, who Mark identifies as 'Bartimaeus'. He translates this name for his readers as 'son of Timaeus'.
3. Luke describes the healing of a *blind man* occurring as Jesus 'approached Jericho'.

There are two questions that call for answers, and they are:

- i) Were *two* blind men healed, or only *one*?
- ii) Did the healing occur on *leaving* Jericho or on *entering* Jericho?

It is sometimes suggested that in order to resolve the perceived 'conflict' in these accounts we should assume that these verses record *two separate events*, but I believe that not only is this explanation unnecessary, it is also erroneous.

### **1st. How many blind men were there?**

I have no difficulty accepting that there were, as Matthew states, *two* blind men healed. This is stated so plainly that there can be no argument. The reason why Mark specifically names just *one* of them, Bartimaeus, is that he was apparently well-known in the Jericho region. This is suggested by the fact that the Greek text of Mark 10:46 translates quite literally as '*the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus the blind beggar*'.

The naming of the father in this way probably indicates that he was a man of some standing in Jericho. Notice, also, the use of the definite article: '**the** blind beggar' – not 'a blind beggar'. There would be little point in naming the father and son in this way, if they were unknown in the community.

This also suggests that the healing of Bartimaeus was given more prominence than that of his blind, anonymous companion, because he was a familiar figure in Jericho. It was quite common for beggars, whether blind or otherwise disabled, to become familiar figures in the towns and cities in which they lived. We have examples of this in John 9, which records the healing of another blind man, and also in the account of the curing of the lame man, mentioned in Acts 4. Both were clearly very familiar figures. Again, it may even be that Bartimaeus was the more vociferous – more vocal – of the two blind men in clamouring for the attention of Jesus. This seems to be suggested in Mark's account.

### **2nd. Where did the miracle occur?**

Remember that Matthew and Mark say '*leaving Jericho*', whilst Luke says, '*approaching Jericho*'. Now this appears to be a very clear contradiction. Is it possible to reconcile the two accounts? Well, I suggest that, if we spend a short time looking at Jericho's history and geography, we shall find it easier to resolve the problem...

### **3rd. 'Old' Jericho**

Although this event is one of only two references to Jericho found in the Gospels, we must remember that it was a city which, by that time, had already existed for many centuries. This is a fact firmly established by archaeological research. The first excavation of the Jericho site was carried out by a team of German archaeologists in the years 1907 to 1909, and their work was followed by an expedition by the British School of Archaeology led by Professor John Garstang, which lasted from 1929 to 1936, and which was followed in 1952 by that of the American archaeologist, Kathleen Kenyon.

The latest – (and I believe the last) – work on what is known as '*The Garstang Trench*' was done in the mid-1950's, after which the political climate in Palestine virtually ended the archaeological work of foreign nationals.

### **Many 'Jerichos'**

However, the most important result to emerge from this work was the discovery of *the earliest stratified levels revealing human occupation, ever found at any archaeological site anywhere in the world*. The mound at Ancient Jericho has revealed periods of human occupation down to a level of 45 feet, and scholars now believe that the top-most evidence of human occupation of the site occurred about 1700 B.C., whilst the lowest remains, found on the bedrock of the trench, are thought to date from 7000 B.C.

Remember, that the current site of *ancient Jericho* is actually a mound that 'grew' through thousands of years. It 'grew' simply because when the original settlement, built on the bedrock, was abandoned, those who later resettled the site did not clear it but merely built upon it. In this way the level of the occupied site was raised, strata upon strata, until it became the mound it is today. I can testify, from personal observation, that the various levels can be clearly seen on the sides of the 45-foot deep trench.

This means that Jericho was an ancient Canaanite city long before being destroyed by Joshua (Josh.4; 24) and there is evidence that, after its destruction by the Israelite army, in the course of its long history, the city was destroyed several times. After the city had been conquered it was given to the *tribe of Benjamin* (Josh.18; 21).

Later, during the time of the Judges, it was occupied by the *Moabites*, led by their King Eglon, at which time it was known as '*The City of the Palms*'. (Jud.1:16 ; 3;13) Later still, we read in 1st Kings 6:14, that it was '*rebuilt*' by Hiel of Bethel, in the time of *King Ahab*. And it was yet again destroyed at the time of the Babylonian Captivity, and later rebuilt once more.

### **Between the Testaments**

It was during the Inter-Testamental Period that Jericho came under *Roman* control and was governed by a 'Captain' – ('*Strategos*'; in Latin), - and during its time under the Romans, the city was given to Cleopatra, by Mark Anthony, and she 'leased' it to Herod the Great for 200 talents.

King Herod then built a new city south of the old one, complete with a castle, an amphitheatre, a hippodrome, and beautiful gardens with various water-features, and Jericho became his winter-residence. In fact, this is where he died in 4 B.C. This city, known as '*Herodian Jericho*', later suffered the fate of earlier cities. It was destroyed by the Emperor *Vespasian*, in 68 A.D. But the important fact is that this city, virtually adjoining the old site, was *the city that Jesus knew*.

We could continue to follow Jericho's turbulent history through succeeding centuries – turbulent, because it was destroyed and rebuilt several times. Moslems destroyed it in 638 A.D. Egyptian soldiers destroyed it in 1840. In 1871 it was destroyed by fire. And, after each destruction, it was rebuilt.

### **Jesus and Jericho**

But, although it would be interesting to study this later history, what concerns us at the moment is the fact that the miraculous healing occurred when Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem for the last time, after leaving Galilee in the north. (Matt.19:1) Jericho was the last halt for pilgrims when they travelled to The City of David from Galilee and Perea.

They came by way of Jericho, to avoid passing through Samaria, and Jesus, descending from the north, would first enter and pass through what archaeologists call '*Canaanite Jericho*', that is our '*old Jericho*', where the '*Garstang Trench*' has been excavated, and he would then enter '*Herodian Jericho*'. In other words, there was a point at which he left the ruins of the *ancient city* and passed into the *modern city* built by Herod.

When we take into consideration the geographical proximity of the 'old' and the 'new' cities, it is not difficult to reconcile the statements made by the Gospel writers. He was '*leaving*' Canaanite Jericho and '*entering*' Herodian Jericho.

The Gospel records, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, contain no contradictions when we take into consideration such matters as their geographical and historical setting.

**Questions please to: Frank Worgan, 11, Stanier Road, Corby, Northants. NN17 1XP**

## News and Information

### **Ghana Appeal**

The Ghana Appeal has successfully saved many lives, both spiritually and physically, for fifteen years, yet the need and the harvest potential is underestimated. There are still many in urgent need of spiritual guidance who are willing to listen, to study and then to obey the Gospel when they fully understand it.

There will continue to be brethren and their children in urgent need of medical attention. There are more over these years than we could remember who would otherwise not have survived, such as Christabel the baby born with internal abnormalities. She endured corrective operations to become the fine three-year old girl she is now.

We are thankful that through your donations the Ghanaian church has grown; that we have brethren there who, without your medical aid, would have died.

As we have said before, there is also the encouragement of realising the practical love overseas brethren have for them.

We sincerely thank donors and plead that this good work will be allowed to continue.

Those wishing to help, please make cheques payable to: **Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund** and send to the treasurer: **Mrs. Janet Macdonald, 12 Charles Drive, Larbert, Falkirk, Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB Tel: 01324 562480**

## The Church in Slamannan

As from the 14th August 2005, the Church of Christ, in Slamannan village has ceased to meet as a congregation for worship.

After the passing of Bro Peter Wilson, the last

remaining brother in Slamannan, the sisters of the Church decided, with great regret, that they were unable to maintain the Church property, which has since been sold.

The disbanding of the Slamannan congregation marks a loss, not only for the Slamannan District of Churches but also for the village itself.

The Church has witnessed in the Slamannan community over many generations including holding a regular Sunday school that was well supported by the villagers. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

*The members feel troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed but not in despair, cast down, but not destroyed.*

**Grace Snedden, Secretary.**

(I recall attending a couple of socials at Slamannan probably in the late 60's/early 70's, I think, on one occasion at least, accompanying dad when he was speaking, and what sticks with me is a general sense of the warmth and vibrancy of the fellowship. Even from a cursory glance through some back issues of the SS, it is clear that the saints in Slamannan have played an important role over the years in the activities of the Churches. On behalf of all readers of the SS we extend our Christian love to the sisters in Slamannan who have been faced with this difficult decision. Editor)

## Tsunami Relief Work in India - an update

**From Paul and Nirmala Nehru, Tabitha Campus Church of Christ, Pithapuram, India.**

The brethren meeting at Tabitha thank everyone who responded for tsunami relief. We are able to distribute clothing kits to 60 families from Krishnapatnam in Nellore district and Pamidipadu in Prakasham district. Each family kit contained one saree, one dhoti, one

towel and one blouse piece. It is a great help in need.

Regarding the work of the fishermen, our state government is extending every help with 100% grant to put them back to work. There is nothing we can do to equip them with boats and nets at this stage, as our government is now doing that.

The real problem is not providing nets and boats. Most of them have already started going in to sea for fishing. But they are not getting any catch. Even if they get anything, they get a very meagre, scanty catch. They say that the reason is that the sea is very disturbed due to tsunami upheaval and the fish might have gone astray or be dead. We do not know the exact reason, but they are not getting any catch even if they go fishing in the sea. As such they are unable to make ends meet.

Therefore this is the time we need to help them for a season or two, hopefully, until they start getting enough catch, as before. To provide food and other basic needs at minimum level, a family with two dependant children needs £15 per week approximately. We may not be required to assist all of the families all of the time. We need to be selective depending on the local need and availability from time to time. In addition to the 60 families we have helped with clothing, in our recent outreach work, we met about 10 families under such dire need near Uppada-Kinapapeta coast as I have already said, we don't need to assist all the families all the time. But we can genuinely help if we can have some funds at our disposal for this purpose.

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**Bro Allan Ashurst, Stretford**, writes: I asked Paul for this update because I feel the brotherhood needs to know the current situation and the work being done by these brethren. People to the north in West Godavari Andhra Pradesh were not as badly affected as in Tamil Nadu and so have tended to be overlooked by NGO's which means many face severe hardships and even starvation. I have visited these areas in February and can recommend the work being done by

these brethren wholeheartedly. Please send gifts for this work to:

**John S Purcell  
3, Dale Avenue  
Bramhall, Stockport,  
Cheshire SK7 2JP**

With a covering letter saying it is for Tsunami relief work and making cheques payable to **Church of Christ (Stretford)**.

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## A LESSON IN FAITH

One day a 6 year old child was sitting in a classroom. The teacher was explaining evolution to the children. The teacher asked a young boy:

Teacher: Tommy, do you see the tree outside?

Tommy: Yes.

Teacher: Tommy, do you see the grass outside?

Tommy: Yes.

Teacher: Go outside and look up and see if you can see the sky.

Tommy: OK. (On returning) Yes, I saw the sky.

Teacher: Did you see God?

Tommy: No.

Teacher: That's my point. We can't see God because he isn't there. He doesn't exist.

A little girl spoke up wanting to ask the boy some questions. The teacher agreed.

Girl: Tommy, do you see the tree outside?

Tommy: Yes.

Girl: Tommy, do you see the grass outside?

Tommy: Yesssss!!

Girl: Tommy, do you see the teacher?

Tommy: Yes.

Girl: Do you see her brain?

Tommy: No.

Girl: Then according to what we've just been taught, she doesn't have one.

**2 Corinthians 5:7, "For we walk by faith, not by sight**

(Submitted by Tom King, Kirkby-in-Ashfield)

## Coming Events

### Kentish Town, London

Anniversary meetings to be held over the weekend October 1st & 2nd 2005.

#### Saturday 1st October

Meetings at 3 pm & 6 pm with tea at 3.45 pm

#### Sunday 2nd October

10.00 am Bible Study  
11.00 am Breaking of Bread  
6.30 pm Gospel Meeting

*Speaker throughout weekend:*  
Vince O'Donovan.

### Peterhead Annual Social

**Saturday 1st and  
Sunday 2nd October 2005.**

#### Saturday

3.00pm Start followed by refreshments  
6.00pm Evening Service

#### Sunday

10.00 am Bible Class  
11.00 am Breaking of Bread  
6.00 pm Gospel meeting

*Speakers:* Frank Worgan (Corby)  
and Mitch Vick (Stirling)

*A warm welcome awaits all.*

### Stretford, Manchester

The Church meeting in Stretford invites you to 3 special Saturday Meetings in the Green Hut, 538 Kings Road, Stretford, Manchester.

Each meeting at 7.00pm.

The talks will be followed by light refreshments and discussion.

#### October 22nd –

*Speaker:* John Morgan, Hindley.

#### November 19th –

*Speaker:* Mark Hill, Loughborough.

### Newtongrange, Scotland

The Annual Social is to be held on

#### Saturday 8th October 2005

Commencing at 1.00 pm.

*Speaker:* John Kneller, Tranent.

*We will extend a warm welcome  
to all who attend.*

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